

To: Joel
From: Greg
Re: Neighborhood Councils Plan

4/12/97

ADDRESSING MAYOR'S CONCERNS:

The sole concern of the Mayor's Office was that they wanted some assurance that our program would truly empower people, and not further empower the politicians.

The experience of the other cities is that the key to success of the NCs is their independence. That's why all NCs have rejected the opportunity to have direct power. Having such power would make them part of the representative part of the democracy. Instead, they have found that they have more power when they are given the opportunity to be a stronger part of the participatory part of the democracy -- when they become better lobbyists.

Designing boundaries of the funded districts around neighborhoods or communities, helps to guarantee that the councils don't revolve around the councilmembers.

Providing the councils with the ability to communicate also helps with their independence. One way to control people and exercise power, whether as part of a political machine or the running of a country, is to control communication. The NCs (the term I'll use loosely for the groups that will be funded in each community planning district) need to be given enough money for computers, E-mail, Internet, faxes, telephones, and newsletters and flyers. This will allow them to communicate with everyone in their area, City Hall, other councils, and the entire world. This is a critical requirement if they are to be independent.

Further independence would be achieved through the Office of Neighborhoods which would have responsibility for the initial organizing in the planning districts, and later the responsibility to support all the NCs, and ensure that they get all the necessary information. They would help them set up meetings, print newsletters, etc. so there would be less reliance on the councilmembers. This would have to be an independent office. Certainly, it has to be independent of those in Council who don't like the idea in the first place. But everybody needs accountability. One idea is to have the director appointed by the Mayor, subject to approval of the Council like other directors/general managers. Staffing would be through some initial loans of city employees from other departments, and then contract employees for at least the first 3 years. As the funded NCs are created, the local leaders could have the ability to hire some of the experienced community organizers from the Office of Neighborhoods. As more NCs are created, the Office of Neighborhoods will need less and less people. If we don't overpay the Office of Neighborhood organizers, they will be motivated to do a good job so they can eventually become the office staff of the NCs.

DISPUTES:

The success of any NC will be based upon its ability to truly represent the major interest groups in their area. If one group dominates the Board, they won't be taken seriously, and their influence will be diminished. During the initial formation period, it's entirely possible that more than one group will petition the City to be recognized and funded. The City should reserve its first recognitions to those districts that are successful in presenting the City will just one petition. This will provide encouragement

for districts to form true consortiums.

Once those areas have been dealt with, the City can use its dispute mediators, or mediators from non-profits, to help other districts get together. This appears to be a real likely area for in-kind or financial contributions from non-City sources.

The third step would be to send organizers into the districts where no leadership has emerged.

And the last step would be to deal with those districts in which we still have dueling groups. We could take them to the Council for a decision, use mediators for binding arbitration, or simply not recognize anyone until they can get together.

When the plan is approved, we'll be offering money for staff, offices, and equipment, and a real ability to become active, effective lobbyists. Doesn't it make sense that there will be many community leaders in many areas that will fall over themselves to get the city's money? By offering the money, the City will be giving an incentive for leaders in the communities to do what MRT's staff did.

ACTUAL POWER AND THE CHARTER COMMISSIONS:

Everyone is now talking about NCs. Some have specific ideas. Others are just pandering. There is a crying demand for leadership, and a specific proposal. We can do it if we want to.

I still stand by our approach. Get the NCs started, and let them decide what they want.

What's going on now is the everyone is talking about NCs, but few know what they're talking about.

When Raphe asked me what my ideal government would be like, I didn't hesitate. The representative part of it would feature councilmembers, elected by districts, maybe 2 at large, whose primary responsibility would to legislate. The Mayor would have a veto power to keep a check on the Council. The Mayor would be the city's chief administrator, responsible for the departments and the delivery of services. The Council would have powers to keep the Mayor in check, like approving the budget. There would be accountability everywhere. And the actively encourage and promote a grassroots participatory element that has been missing. Beyond the participatory power that the monied interests have, and beyond the political power that the city employee unions have, we need to also allow ordinary people to participate. That's our NC idea.

People like Fleming are talking about NCs as being part of the regulatory/representative process. There would be a substitute for the Council. But regardless of however you elect the elected representatives, you need a system to provide ordinary people with a chance to influence the decisions of their government. The Fleming system allows a handful of people to become a part of their government to the extent that state law permits it. (Legal questions have been raised about the ability of local planning groups to make binding decisions.) But it does nothing to empower or involve everyone in the community. The fact that Gerald Silver sits on a local planning board that has the ability to veto zone changes does nothing to encourage the people on the next block to get involved in Charter reform, the city's budget, or a community graffiti clean-up.

Leaving the creation of NCs to the Charter commissions might mean that we'll be putting something in the Charter that is purely conceptual. If the system doesn't work, they might be doomed to failure because of the time it will take to amend the Charter. Starting them now gives us an opportunity to begin testing the ideas.

METHOD:

Using the 20-year experiences of Portland, Birmingham, Dayton, and St. Paul, and the 3-year experience in the CD8, commit to a 3-year "pilot" project that will test whether or not these successes can be replicated throughout the entire city.

The city would fund offices, staff, and equipment in an equivalent each of the 35 community planning districts, and two in CD8 which already has the infrastructure.

They would choose their own leaders and adopt their own by-laws in order to maintain their independence from City Hall. They would, however, be accountable to the City and the Controller for the proper use of those funds.

Initially, most of workers would be in a central Office of Neighborhoods, which would create an independent office, headed by a city employee. The employees would be contract workers. They would be skilled in community organizing. This would ensure that councils are created in all parts of city in a fair and expedient manner, and would not be reliant upon City Council staffs.

As the empowerment congresses are created, less staff would be needed in the Office of Neighborhoods, and more in the local offices. Eventually, the Office of Neighborhoods would have the main duty of services the needs of the local councils, helping them with City Hall problems; arranging for leadership, cultural sensitivity training; arranging the quarterly Congress of Neighborhoods meeting which would be attended by representatives from all the planning districts; and helping to use the city's buying power for materials, equipment, and printing.

It happens very rarely, but councilmembers/Mayor might want to have a way of terminating a totally dysfunctional NC. They could be required to have a contract with the City for the money we're giving them. But someone would have to determine if a breach occurred. You want to prevent a single councilmember, however, from being able to disband an NC with which they are having political disagreements. One way to do this would be to permit defunding only if there is agreement from the Council, Mayor, and Controller.

BUDGET:

First year. Wouldn't need expenses for 37 offices in first year, because we won't have them all on-line in first year. As they come on line, people could be transferred from the Office of Neighborhoods if that's what the residents want. The need for staff in the council offices wouldn't be as great in the formation years, as it would be after they were formed. The plan may be to pick an amount, and then you carry over savings if things don't move as fast as thought.

37 District Offices

Office Rental -- 1,800 sq. ft @ \$1.50 sq. ft.

This is a wild guess on size. The Neighborhood Connections office in Pasadena is about 1000 SF. It includes an office for the director, a reception area, small cubicles for two community organizers, and a conference table for about 8 people. The Pasadena office is about the same size as the offices I saw in Little Rock.

Obviously, office space rates vary widely depending upon location. Since every area will get the same budget, those who can find ways of saving costs, like using a government facility (school, municipal building) or who can get donated space from the private sector, will have more money to use for other things. The rule of thumb is 200 SF for each person's work area. \$1.50/SF is a high number that reflects the downtown office space rents.

Another way to do this is for the City to say that it will pay the rent directly to the landlord for office space up to 1800 SF and not to exceed \$1.50/SF. But if the NCs are able to get free space or negotiate a good deal, the City will share the savings with the NC. So there is an incentive for the NC to find a good deal.

Parking -- \$45-100 per person/month. Again, could do savings sharing.

One time communication equipment installation -- \$10/sq. ft.

General office expenses (utilities, supplies, custodial) -- \$??

Staff --

We shouldn't tell the NCs how to staff their offices. But we should give them enough money to hire enough staff for them to be effective.

(1) Neighborhood Coordinator -- \$40,000

(2) Community Services Representatives/Organizers -- \$25,000

(1) General clerical/reception -- \$17,000

(We have the job descriptions that Pasadena uses.)

Equipment --

Computers: (Get prices from ITA. Might be able to use Internet for free through City's contract)

Fax:

Phones and Voice Mail:

Postage and printing for community newsletters/notices:

Travel (to quarterly Congress meetings, neighborhoods USA conference, special training, City Hall, etc.):

Furniture: (I've urged the City to save the furniture that will be left over when the rest of City Hall moves out.)

Office of Neighborhoods

Staff:

(1) Director -- \$70,000

(1) Asst Director - \$45,000

(20) Community Organizers/Potential area directors -- \$35,000

. (3) Clerical Support -- \$17,000

Office Expenses:

Quarterly Congress of Neighborhoods Meetings:

Location/Set-up

Notices (Printing/Mailing)

Council Liaisons? 15 @ \$30,000

One in each Council office to maintain liaison with NCs. Wait until after NCs become functional?

Special Grants (After formed/2nd year?) As is done in Seattle, a certain amount of money is set aside each year to fund projects in each neighborhood. Applications are made to the Mayor's office. Match is required. Could be labor, materials, or money.